

THE ADVENTURES OF DOCTOR DOLITTLE

Continuing the History of His Peculiar
Life at Home and His Astounding
Experiences in Foreign Lands

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PREVIOUS CHAPTERS—Dr. Dolittle is a Vandy physician. He neglects his practice in order to treat sick animals, and finally is left alone with Polynesia, the parrot; Geo-Geo, the monkey; Jip, the dog, and Too-Too, the owl. From Polynesia Dr. Dolittle learns to understand and talk the language of animals. A swallow brings from Africa the news of a terrible illness among the monkeys there. They have heard of Dr. Dolittle and beg him to come to them, which he does. He leaves on his return journey, after a farewell feast. The doctor's boat next stops at the land of the Geo-Geos. Here they learn that the martins, cousins of the swallows, are being killed off to provide feathers for the Kings' wives. The martins seek the doctor's help. It is suggested that they live on food from the ship's stores until the flies and mosquitoes, their regular diet, have bitten the Geo-Geos into state of desperation.

THE first sign of success that came to those on the ship was when Gub-Gub woke up in the middle of the night, crying out that he was all over mosquito bites. One by one the rest of the ship's company were awakened and kept awake by the stinging flies.

"Ah, hah!" said the Doctor, sitting up in bed and busily swatting in all directions. "This is splendid. I wonder how the Geo-Geo ladies like this."

But the mosquito plague grew and grew—more terrible every hour. Those on the ship really suffered a great deal for the sake of their friends, the martins. When the Doctor and the animals ventured on deck in the morning they found the air outside thick with mosquitoes and flying ants, and they were finally driven back by the pests into their cabin again. Then they slammed the doors shut and stuffed up every crack to keep out the swarming insects.

Poor Gub-Gub was a dreadful sight—he was, in fact, nothing but one large pink mosquito bite. The Doctor had to put him to soak in a bathtub of boracic acid to reduce the swelling. And as for the pushmi-pullyu, having no tail to use as a fly swat, he had a perfectly terrible time. But he never grumbled.

"Of course, they could not very well stay shut up in the cabin without any fresh air for days on end, and soon the Doctor, realizing that he must get some protection from the flies for himself and his animals. So he sent for one of the swallow leaders.

"In answer to his summons it was the chief of the leaders that came, a very neat, trim little bird, with long, long wings and sharp, snappy eyes. Speedy-the-Skimmer he was called, a name truly famous throughout the whole of the feather world. He was the champion fly catcher of Africa, Europe and America. For years every summer he had won all the flying races, having broken his own record only last year by crossing the Atlantic in eleven and a half hours at a speed of more than two hundred miles an hour.

"Speedy," said the Doctor, "I and my party are imprisoned in our ship here. We dare not go out to take the air or stretch our legs for fear of the mosquitoes and biting flies. Can you do anything for us?"

"Why, certainly," said Speedy. "I'll tell off a few hundred wrens to mount guard over the ship here and keep the mosquitoes away from you and your party. They'll take care of you. Your scheme is working splendidly, Doctor. The Geo-Geo

ladies are having a frightful time. They're much worse off than you are, you know, because they wear fewer clothes and the flies have more room to bite. I'll send you the wrens right away."

So saying, Speedy flew off. And from that time on the Doctor's ship had a special guard of 900 wrens—very small birds, but marvelous fly catchers, John Dolittle and his pets were now able to come safely out on deck and take the air and enjoy themselves.

Two days after that, in the morning before it was quite daylight, the Doctor said to Jip:

"I think I ought to go ashore into the houses up—they're only made of grass.

crowded to the rail of the ship as the Doctor came bounding down to the river.

"What is it, Doctor," called the owl as soon as the Doctor was within earshot—"flies?"

"No," gasped the Doctor, as he came panting up on to the deck. "Ants!—flying ants, black ants, red ants, white ants—ants in hundred and thousands and millions. You can't see the houses any more—nothing but mounds and mounds of ants."

"What has happened to the people?" asked Dab-Bad.

"They've shut themselves inside the houses. But the ants are eating the

Hurry, for pity's sake! It's the biggest job you ever had to do. You'll need every flycatcher you can raise. And hurry, Speedy, as fast as you know how."

Then the swift and famous Skimmer rose high in the air on his curved and flashing wings of blue. And reaching to terrific height, he began letting out shriek after shriek—a high, piercing, whistling cry. Those on the deck of the ship below watched him as he swept the sky in dizzy circles, calling, calling, calling: "Tee-wee-hee! Tee-wee-hee! Tee-wee-HEE!"

And very soon, in answer to the swallow leader's cry, flycatchers of every description, color and kind left whatever they were doing and came swirling into the air in a dark and ever-growing mass above the Doctor's ship.

Then suddenly, led by Speedy-the-Skimmer, the enormous army of birds made off for the town at a terrific pace. The rush of those millions of wings through the air was like the North Wind gone mad.

"Come along," said the Doctor. "We must see that the Geo-Geos are rescued from their plight. I started this—I've got to see it through."

The animals all jumped up and followed him as he left the ship and raced off toward the town.

As they drew near to it a curious buzzing noise reached their ears. Tremendous—like some great machine purring, whirring smoothly—it grew and grew; the noise of millions and millions of insects working busily in the sun.

When the animals got closer the sight that met their eyes was indeed a strange one. You couldn't see the houses of the town at all. Over everything in view lay a thick moving carpet of solid ants.

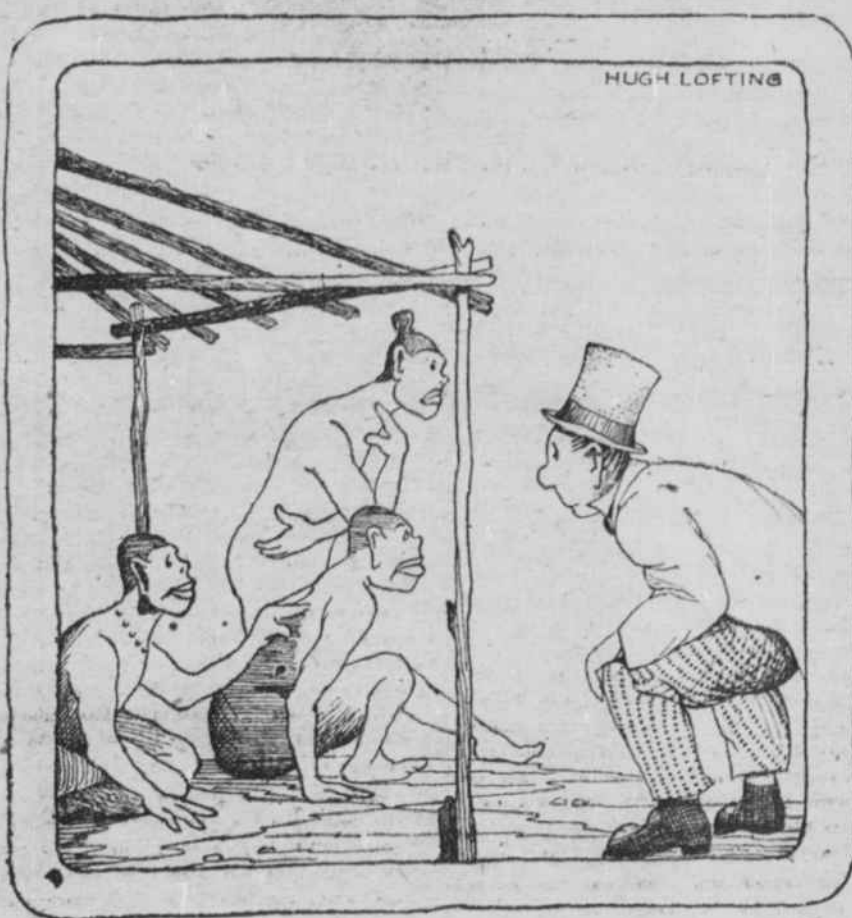
"Golly!" said Too-Too. "I'm glad I'm not a Geo-Geo. How on earth are they ever going to get out from under that mess?"

But even while he spoke the fly-catchers swept down upon the moving carpet in countless numbers. And then began the most terrific battle ever seen by mortal eyes.

It lasted three hours. And, although the flycatchers won, by the time the last of the ants and beetles and moths and mosquitoes had been driven away the birds were so exhausted that they sat and lay and squatted in panting, weary millions on the ground, hardly able to move their wings another flap.

And now could be seen what work of havoc the insects had done. The straw thatching of the huts was all eaten away, only the bare poles remaining. The shade trees before the doors were stripped of their leaves, bare, as though winter had come in a night. And from within the frames of the dwellings frightened, huddled families of black folk gazed out at the white man and the millions of birds who had saved them from destruction. Not a rag of clothing remained among the lot of them, for the moths had eaten every scrap of wool and cotton they possessed; not a vestige of a roof remained above their heads, and they themselves were covered with mosquito bites. But their

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From within the frames of the dwellings frightened families of black folks looked out at the white man

town to see what's going on. I notice that the ants and beetles have started increasing at a great pace the last day or so. I am a little bit uneasy. I mustn't let this thing go too far."

From the deck the animals watched the Doctor depart. For protection he had gloves on his hands, and his head, all but the eyes, was covered with a red handkerchief.

"I'm glad he didn't take any of us with him," said Gub-Gub, who was now entirely recovered from his bites. "Just look at the flies swarming around his head!"

It was not long after John Dolittle left that Too-Too suddenly cried:

"Oh, look! Here comes the Doctor back, running. Goodness, he's all excited!—waving his arms! See! I wonder what has happened in the town."

Dab-Dab, Gub-Gub, Jip, Too-Too, the pushmi-pullyu and the white mouse

It's what they'll do when they've eaten the houses that I'm afraid of. Heaven help the people if the ants are still hungry then! Too-Too, get the Skimmer for me as quick as you can. Hurry, or the whole of Geo-Geo-Land will be wiped out!"

So off went Too-Too to find Speedy.

"My gracious! I had no idea matters had gone so far as this," said the Doctor, sitting down and mopping his brow. "It's lucky I went to-day to take a look at the town. I kind of thought that something was wrong. . . . I do wish Too-Too would hurry. There isn't a moment to lose. Ah, good! Here he is—and the Skimmer, too."

"Speedy," said the Doctor as soon as the trim little bird had settled on the deck, "the town of the Geo-Geos is being eaten up by ants. Tell all the flycatchers to go back to work. Take them by yourself to the town and clear those ants away.